

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 3979

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PINR, SCUL, SOPN, AF
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S CALL ON MINISTER OF RADIO AND TELEVISION

1. AFTERNOON MONDAY, MAY 15, I CALLED, ACCOMPANIED BY PAO, ON MINISTER OF RADIO AND TELEVISION, SULEIMAN LAEQ. LAEQ RECEIVED US IN OFFICE OF FORMER HEAD OF AFGHAN RADIO/TV (AANRT). ARMED SOLDIERS WERE MUCH IN EVIDENCE BOTH WITHIN BUILDING AND OUTSIDE, WHERE SEVERAL TANKS STILL GUARD THIS IMPORTANT BASTION. NO FAMILIAR FACES OF OFFICIALS WERE TO BE SEEN ON THIS CALL. WHILE MINISTER APPEARS TO SPEAK AND UNDERSTAND A BIT OF ENGLISH, MINISTRY PROVIDED INTERPRETER

WHO TRANSLATED REMARKS THROUGHOUT MEETING.

2. CONVERSATION, WHICH LASTED ABOUT 40 MINUTES, WAS CORDIAL, EVEN JOVIAL AT TIMES. MINISTER WAS RELAXED AND INFORMAL. HE STARTED BY NARRATING AUTOBIOGRAPHY, MAINLY FAMILIAR POINTS, RECITING WITH PERHAPS RESTRAINED RELISH NUMEROUS FAILURES THAT FOR POLITICAL REASONS HAD MARKED HIS EARLIER CAREER: FAILURE TO GRADUATE ON FIRST ATTEMPT AT ACADEMIC DEGREE (ISLAMIC LAW), LACK OF EMPLOYMENT AFTER LATER SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF UNIVERSITY COURSE IN LETTERS, DEFEATS IN PARLIAMENTARY POLITICAL CAMPAGINS.
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HE SAID HIS FATHER -- WHO IS STILL ROBUST AT 86, AS ATTESTED BY RECENT BIRTH OF NEW SON -- HAD ALWAYS WANTED HIM TO BECOME A MULLAH. THIS GAVE OPENING FOR RETORT, RECEIVED IN GOOD HUMOR, THAT AS MINISTER OF RADIO/TV, LAEQ WAS NOW IN POSITION OF CHIEF MULLAH OF AFGHANISTAN. MINISTER SAID HE HAD TRAVELED BUT LITTLE ABROAD, MENTIONING TURKEY AND THE SOVIET UNION AMONG PLACES HE HAD VISITED, AND

THAT, UNLIKE SEVERAL OF HIS MINISTERIAL COLLEAGUES, HE HAD NEVER SEEN THE U.S. LAEQ SPOKE WITH PRIDE OF HAVING WON THREE LITERARY PRIZES AND SAID THAT AMERICAN LITERATURE HAD PROVIDED HIM WITH SOME GOOD MODELS; WHEN ASKED, HE CITED -- IN GOOD MARXIST TRADITION -- JACK LONDON BY NAME. HE IS A ROBUST, LOQUACIOUS MAN, WHO CLEARLY ENJOYS POLITICAL POWER.

3. OPENING BUSINESS OF THE CALL, I STATED THAT AMERICAN POLICY TOWARD AFGHANISTAN HAD REMAINED THE SAME THROUGHOUT THE 35 YEARS THAT WE HAD HAD RELATIONS: U.S. OBJECTIVES WERE TO SUPPORT AFGHAN INDEPENDENCE, TO HELP ITS PEOPLE IMPROVE THEIR STANDARD OF LIVING, AND TO MAINTAIN PEACE IN THE REGION. THE MINISTER RESPONDED THAT AFGHANISTAN, TOO, WANTED PEACE. THE NEW GOVERNMENT WANTED TO WORK FOR THE NATION'S DEVELOPMENT, ESPECIALLY FOR THE WELFARE OF WORKERS AND PEASANTS. IF THERE WERE TROUBLES IN SOME NEIGHBORING AREAS (HE PARTICULARLY MENTIONED IRAN AND PAKISTAN), THEY HAD THEIR ORIGIN IN THOSE PLACES, NOT IN AFGHANISTAN. HE APPRECIATED AMERICA'S IMPORTANCE IN THE WORLD AND ITS ROLE IN MAINTAINING PEACE.

4. I DESCRIBED BRIEFLY OUR PAST RELATIONS, PARTICULARLY THOSE OF ICA, IN WORKING WITH AANRT, CITING A RECENT TV WORKSHOP AND OUR PROVISIONS OF FILMS FOR TV BROADCAST, IN SCIENCE AND OTHER SUBJECTS. WE OFFERED TO CONTINUE SUCH COOPERATION. LAEQ EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR PAST HELP; HE REMARKED THAT, IN THE PAST, EQUIPMENT HAD BEEN PROVIDED

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WHILE NOWADAYS ASSISTANCE TOOK MORE THE FORM OF FINISHED FILMS. HE SAID THAT THERE HAD BEEN MANY CHANGES IN THE ORGANIZATION AND NEW STAFF HAD NOT YET HAD TIME TO EXAMINE WHAT HAD ALREADY BEEN PROVIDED. HE ASKED OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT THIS WOULD TAKE SOME TIME; THEY WOULD LOOK AT THE FILMS AND SEE WHAT WOULD BE USEFUL TO THEM. WE SAID THAT WHILE WE COULD NOT ALWAYS PROVIDE WHAT WAS ASKED, ICA WAS READY TO DISCUSS ANY REQUEST FOR HELP OR SUGGESTION FOR COOPERATION, WHEN THE MINISTRY WAS READY TO RAISE SUCH MATTERS.

5. AFTER THE MINISTER CONFIRMED THAT AFGHAN FILM NOW CAME UNDER THE MINISTRY'S JURISDICTION, WE TOLD HIM BRIEFLY ABOUT THE HELMAND VALLEY FILM PROJECT, AND OFFERED THE WORKPRINT TO THE MINISTRY OFFICIALS WHEN IT WAS DONE TO SEE WHETHER THEY WOULD FAVOR ITS SHOWING IN AFGHANISTAN.

6. MINISTER LAEQ CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT HE WAS APPRECIATIVE OF AMERICAN INTEREST SHOWN BY OUR TAKING UP WORKING CONTACTS EARLY.

7. COMMENT: THE MINISTER THUS INDICATED COGNIZANCE OF THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CALL. WE HOPE THAT THE VISIT

ALSO CALLED ATTENTION TO POSSIBILITIES OF CONTINUED COOPERATION
WITH ICA THAT DESERVES THE MINISTRY'S EARLY EXAMINATION.
THE NEW ORGANIZATION IS CLEARLY NOT YET IN POSITION TO UNDER-
TAKE MANY PRACTICAL TASKS. IT SEEMS LIKELY -- APART FROM
POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS THAT MAY MOTIVATE SOME APPEARANCE OF
EVEN-HANDEDNESS IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S APPLICATION TO FOREIGN
MISSIONS FOR MEDIA ASSISTANCE -- THAT TV'S VORACIOUS APPETITE
FOR MATERIAL MAY EVENTUALLY MAKE IT NECESSARY FOR AANRT TO USE
SOME AMERICAN MATERIAL ONCE IT STARTS BROADCASTING AGAIN.
THE CLOSE WORKING RELATIONSHIP, HOWEVER, THAT PREVIOUSLY
DISCLOSED COMMON PURPOSES AND MADE GENUINE COOPERATION FEASIBLE
WAS THE RESULT OF LITERALLY YEARS OF CULTIVATION BY MISSION
OFFICERS. IT WILL NOT BE RESTORED WITH NEW APPARATUS OVERNIGHT,
IF EVERY.
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